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CURIOUS CARVING BY ALBERT DURER.

VASARI, in his "Lives of the Painters," speaks of Albert Durer as "a diligent, industrious, *universal man*;" and his

conception, and the wonderful union of boldness and correctness of design which they display. His *woodcuts* are considered



THE NAMING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.—FROM A CARVING BY ALBERT DURER, IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

claim to the title of a "universal man" will be readily admitted by all who are acquainted with his productions. His *paintings* are admired for the lively and fertile imagination, the excellent

masterpieces of the art. He was the first who excelled in *etching*. His *portraits* also were highly esteemed. Albert Durer, however, not only distinguished himself as a painter,

and an engraver on copper and wood, he also executed several pieces of sculpture with surprising delicacy and natural expression of character. An admirable specimen of his skill in this department of art is preserved in the Print-room of the British Museum, to which institution it was bequeathed by the late R. Payne Knight, Esq., who had purchased it at Brussels for 500 guineas, several years before. This exquisite piece of sculpture measures seven inches and three-quarters in height, and five inches and a half in width. It is carved in *alto-relievo*, in hone-stone of a delicate cream colour, and is in one piece, with the exception of the dog and one or two books in the front. It bears date 1510. The subject is, "*The Naming of John the Baptist*," according to the narrative contained in the Gospel by Luke, chapter i. verses 59 to 64.

In the front, to the right, is an old man with a tablet, on which some Hebrew characters are inscribed. Further to the right, and immediately behind him, is another old man; and behind him a young man, said by some to be intended by the artist for a portrait of himself. Kneeling before the recording priest, is an aged nurse with the infant John in her arms. On the bed, Elizabeth, the mother of John, is seen lying, on the more distant side of which a female attendant is standing, and on the other an elderly man is seen resting on the edge of the bed. This latter figure is doubtless intended for Zacharias, the father of John, and as the sacred narrative informs us that he was struck dumb for a season, the artist has represented him in the act of making signs to Elizabeth with his fingers.

The figures in the foreground are executed in bold relief; and the character and expression of the heads have rarely been surpassed in any work of sculpture executed on the same scale. Albert Durer's monogram, with the date 1510, is inscribed on a small tablet at the foot of the bedstead.

This curious carving is in perfect condition, with the exception of the hands of Zacharias and Elizabeth, some of the fingers of which are broken off.

Those who are acquainted with the works of Albert Durer will perceive that our artists have copied his style of drawing and engraving very successfully.

A PEEP AT COUNTRY COUSINS, AND HOW IT ENDED.

LETTER II.

Whitehaven, April, 1820.

MY DEAR FATHER,—My last letter would say all that was necessary regarding family detail, so I will go on with my description of old customs, which you say you like so much to receive. Tom and Edward, the two younger boys, have lately been very full of an odd kind of barring-out, in which they have been engaged at the village school. This said affair has had a melancholy ending, as you will hear. The barring-out, it seems, is an annual spring-tide event, when all arrangements concerning the holidays and other matters are settled between the master and his scholars, yet it is considered a profound mystery, and the appointed day is only whispered to the initiated. When it arrived this year, the school-room was filled long before daylight, a good fire was lighted, and the door securely barricaded. Soon after daybreak, exclamations resounded of "He is coming, he is coming!" and with beating hearts (so Tom declares) the boys awaited the arrival of their dominie. He knocked at the door, then tried the latchet, but not a sound could be heard from within, and finally he looked in at the windows, confronting the boldest of the school, to whom he called out, "Boys, open the door! boys, I insist on your letting me in." But neither coaxing or threats availed him, and he left the place, to return in a few minutes with my uncle, because he was looked on as the principal parent in the village. All these preliminaries are styled "sham," and the chief fun consists in firing off salutes with a pistol, generally wheedled out of some reluctant father for the purpose. My uncle came up under a grand discharge, since, you must know, he had privately furnished each of his three boys with a pistol the previous evening, and a long speechifying succeeded, and then the master demanded

through the keyhole what was the cause of the insurrection; to which his riotous pupils replied, "Our old laws, sir," and my uncle made answer, "Very well, boys, let me see them." "Here they are, sir," was the glad response, and the protocol or manifesto of grievances was pushed through a chink in the door, and in a loud voice the dominie proceeded to read the document. I saw a copy of it afterwards, and its principal negotiations were, "that the scholars should neither be whipped nor set in a corner; that they should have three vacations, of two weeks each, at Easter, Christmas, and Midsummer, as well as two days' hunting, and two days' fishing." The master in my uncle's presence signed the paper, and in the safe custody of the latter it was then lodged for the ensuing twelve months. Of course, no lessons were attempted that day, and a general holiday was allowed, which gave rise to much merry-making, and this unfortunately ended in an accident which proved fatal to a brave little lad named Hugh Johnstone. We were told afterwards that the boy's clothes caught fire, when the scholars were engaged in the daring amusement of jumping over some burning tar-barrels, that my uncle had generously bestowed in order to make fine bonfires in honour of the barring-out. So employed, the child's woollen trousers had probably been ignited some time before he took any notice of them, and when he did, it was with great difficulty that the fire could be extinguished; and the surface of his body was so extensively burned, that, after thirty-eight hours of very sad suffering, the little lad expired. My aunt stayed with the boy the whole time; but before she came back we knew that life had departed by the tolling of the passing bell early last Thursday morning; and in the evening Susannah Gawthorpe came in to us weeping bitterly, for the lad was her own cousin. She asked me whether I would accompany her to Widow Johnstone's, assuring me my going would be regarded as a token of goodwill. Of course, I assented, but could not help saying,—I longed so greatly to take her to my heart and try to console her,—"Why is it you will not let me be your friend, when I like you so much?" She replied, very sweetly, "Indeed, you are mistaken, since I liked you the first moment we met, and I know I have done wrong in appearing to avoid you." It is evident to me that some other cause than personal feeling towards myself has had to do with her peculiar manner; but we said no more on the subject just then, for our hearts were full of sad thoughts, and it was with mingled awe and reluctance that I thought of first looking upon the face of death. All dread was, however, superfluous; nothing could be more peaceful or more exquisitely beautiful than the young boy's quiet features. A little mirror over the chimney-piece, and several coloured prints, that hung round the room, I noticed were all covered by white cloths, and several young men and women sat round the body to secure its undisturbed repose until it should be laid in the grave. Even the widow seemed, to my surprise, really glad to see us; and, taking us into an inner room, perhaps experienced some relief in giving free vent to her sorrow in the presence of one who had loved her boy as Susannah had done. But she was soon wanted elsewhere, and we, in less than half an hour, took our leave, Susannah gladly accepting my invitation of her to sleep with me that night. A few words which fell from her when we were preparing for bed gave me, I thought, some insight into the feelings on her part that I had not hitherto suspected; but of these I must tell you another time. On the day before the funeral the clerk of the village church went round from house to house with a bell, which he rang in a peculiar toll, denoting the parish to which the deceased belonged. Every now and then he stopped, while his long funeral band, placed in his hat, floated on the breeze, as he made proclamation: "All friends and neighbours are desired to attend the burial of Hugh Johnstone, from Red Hope-lane to St. James's Church, to-morrow at three o'clock." This was the general invitation; but to the dwelling of those most nearly connected, and to the more influential persons in the neighbourhood, there was sent round a young girl wearing a large white calash, and carrying a tray under her arm, in